

TEXAS

COORDINATED APPROACH TO CHILD HEALTH (CATCH)

PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM

Together, poor nutrition and lack of physical activity have contributed to an unprecedented epidemic of childhood obesity: the percentage of young people who are overweight has doubled since 1980. More than 60% of young people eat too much fat, and less than 20% eat the recommended number of servings of fruits and vegetables each day. Seventy-three percent of high school students do not participate in moderate physical activity.

EVIDENCE THAT PREVENTION WORKS

Rigorous studies show that health education in schools effectively reduces health risk behaviors among young people. The Coordinated Approach to Child Health (CATCH) is a coordinated school health program designed to increase children's physical activity levels and improve their diets. It was effective in changing these behaviors in a trial among third-grade students in four states—California, Louisiana, Minnesota, and Texas. Behavior modifications brought about through the program were still evident among CATCH children 3 years after the study ended.

PROGRAM EXAMPLE

The Prevention Research Center at the University of Texas–Houston Health Science Center is working with the Texas Department of Health and the Texas Diabetes Council to disseminate CATCH to schools throughout Texas. Prevention researchers have developed a social marketing program to accelerate the establishment of CATCH in Texas schools. To date, this program has been adopted by more than 800 schools in Texas and is reaching more than 500,000 children. Fifteen hundred teachers in Texas have been trained to use CATCH.

IMPLICATIONS

Nutrition and physical activity programs in schools are powerful weapons for stemming the epidemic of obesity among young people. Working together, prevention researchers, health department staff, and education specialists can speed the adoption of these programs in our nation's schools.